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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO  
E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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Ha'aretz reported that Israel has still not kept a promise that it made the U.S. last April to demarcate the built-up areas of every West Bank settlement, for the purpose of setting limits on the settlements' growth. The newspaper says that as a result, the U.S. has halted the work of the Israeli-American task force that was supposed to deal with this issue.

Leading media reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz met with PA Interior Minister Nasser Yousef in Herzliya last night, and that they agreed that Jericho be handed over to PA security control on Wednesday. Security responsibility of Tulkarm will be transferred next week, and that of Qalqilya later. The radio quoted senior Palestinian sources as saying that the agreement on the handover of Palestinian cities is a retreat from the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings. Israel Radio quoted PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas as saying that Israel has agreed to the release of Ahmed Sa'adat, the PFLP leader who was behind the 2001 assassination of cabinet minister Rehavam Zeevi, and of Arafat associate Fuad Shubaki, whom Israel found guilty of weapons smuggling. The station, which said that this is probably a trial balloon by the Palestinians, cited denials by Israeli military and government officials.

Hatzofe quoted senior Israeli military officials in the Gaza Strip as saying that PA officials are not blocking the continued arming by terror organizations, that the production of Qassam rockets has continued in recent weeks, and that the Palestinian security organizations have made no attempts to prevent this.

All media reported on, and Yediot and Maariv led with, last night's demonstration on the Ayalon Highway, Tel Aviv's main artery, during which disengagement protesters blocked rush-hour traffic with burning tires for an hour. Eighteen demonstrators were arrested. Jerusalem Post reported that the settler leadership denounced the demonstration and stressed that it was not connected to the event. Maariv reported that thousands of right-wing activists plan to storm the Temple Mount during the evacuation of the Gaza Strip settlements, producing bloody riots.

Jerusalem Post reported that PM Sharon reiterated during a meeting Monday with Dutch PM Jan Peter Balkenende that in Israel's eyes, an intra-Palestinian declaration of truce is not enough. Sharon demanded that the PA dismantle the terrorist organizations, not make agreements with them. All media cited London-based Asharq Al-Awsat's report that Abbas is expected to tell Palestinian factions at a meeting in Cairo today that the refugees' right of return should be viewed "realistically," and that not all Palestinian exiles will return to former homes in Israel and the territories. The media say that Abbas will present "painful concessions" to the factions. Israel Radio reported that Muhammad Nazal, one of Hamas's leaders, told the PA newspaper Al-Ayyam that his organization will not join a Palestinian government even after the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council, and that it will not take part in negotiations with Israel.

Jerusalem Post reported that Israel has doubled its efforts in recent weeks to neutralize American Jewish opposition to the Gaza Strip disengagement plan,

calling on organizations to butt out of its domestic affairs and respect its decisions. The newspaper quoted Consul-General in New York Arye Mekel as saying Monday that he holds almost daily meetings with American Jewish leaders in an effort to create "one voice in the U.S., which supports Israel and its policies without second guessing." Jerusalem Post reported that settler leaders will be in the New York area this week to do the exact opposite and enlist support in the fight against the plan. All media reported that on Monday, American Jews who came on a solidarity trip with Katif Bloc settlers were briefly detained at Ben Gurion Airport.

Jerusalem Post quoted UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as saying in Ramallah Monday that the UN is establishing a register of property damage caused by the West Bank security fence.

Leading media reported that despite pressure from Algerian, Syrian, and Libyan delegates, the speaker of Egypt's parliament, Ahmed Fathy Sorour, decided Monday to allow Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin to deliver the opening address at a convention of parliamentary leaders from Mediterranean and European nations taking place in Cairo. Rivlin cited the lack of warmth toward Israel among Egyptians, and the "dark forces of fundamentalism and terror" that he said "are now the biggest challenge facing us all as free nations." Rivlin added that Israel had its hand stretched out in peace toward its neighbors -- Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinians, and Syria.

All media reported that 800,000 to 1 million supporters of the Lebanese opposition, depending on the sources, demonstrated in Beirut on Monday.

Leading media reported that on Monday, 200 tons of apples produced by Golan Druze crossed the border to Syria. Altogether, 7,000 tons of apples will be exported to Syria. Yediot writes that Israeli apple growers will indirectly benefit from the deal.

Leading media reported that Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz announced Monday that that he intends to ask the government to approve the appointment of Oskar Abu Razeq as director general of his ministry. This is the first time an Israeli Arab would serve as a ministerial director general.

All media reported on the inauguration of Yad Vashem's new museum, the largest Holocaust museum in the world, which will be attended by an unprecedented number of foreign dignitaries today. Yediot reported that the Foreign Ministry decided not to invite a Japanese representative to the ceremony, fearing that he would compare the dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima to the Holocaust.

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Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "The settlers will lose. [But] it may take the national rift caused by disengagement a long time to heal."

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The report [on illegal settler outposts] submitted by Talia Sasson proves that Ariel Sharon has a more solid, long-term plan than anyone imagined."

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz: "The revolutionary change in Hamas's position signifies a degree of acceptance of the peace process.... Having decided to participate in the municipal elections, Hamas now has no choice but to go all the way and become a political party."

[M. J. Rosenberg](#), director of policy analysis for the progressive U.S.-based Israeli Policy Forum, wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Taking actions like the House [Appropriations] Committee did last Tuesday profoundly damages Israel. Israel wants a strong PA that can and will liquidate the suicide bombers and build a democracy that will live in peace with Israel. That is what Bush wants."

Block Quotes:  
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#### I. "Bonfire of Despair"

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (March 15): "'Love will prevail' [the original slogan adopted by the anti-disengagement movement] lost last night big time. The settlers' borrowed slogan went up in smoke yesterday on the [major] Ayalon freeway. It was neither an accident nor the act of a crazed fringe group. Everything ran like clockwork. It was a clear statement of profound significance: the settlers have given up on their effort to win the public's heart.... More than anything else, this attests to the despair that is beginning to sink in among the settlers. It attests to the absence of a means of persuasion, to the end of dialogue. They can't beat Ariel Sharon. Neither polemics nor Knesset votes will work. Now they are trying their hand at force.... The Palestinians and their press vociferously protest the IDF roadblocks in the territories and demand that they be removed because they restrict the population's freedom of movement and encumber it. What the settlers did last night was to create a burning roadblock for half the people of Israel. The Palestinians hate the slow crossing at roadblocks. So do Israelis. The settlers will lose. It may take the national rift caused by disengagement a long time to heal. That is a shame because, despite everything and in spite of everything, they are beloved brethren, and I am terrified by the possibility that the fire might burn the connective sinews."

#### II. "A Dream Pulled Off the Shelves"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 15): "Years of terror, two Intifadas, global pressure and American arm-twisting in particular had to happen for this unpredictable man [Ariel Sharon], the father of the settlements, to change azimuth. At first people thought that disengagement from Gaza was a trick. Then they said it was the first and last step in withdrawal from the territories. Now the picture has changed. The report submitted by Talia Sasson proves that Ariel Sharon has a more solid, long-term plan than anyone imagined. Like a court lawyer who never asks a question to which he doesn't know the answer, Sharon knew exactly what Sasson's findings would be. Now he has put these 105 unauthorized outposts on the national agenda, as the next stage in the pullout from Gaza. In so doing, Sharon has made it clear that in a two-state solution to the conflict, Israel will be gone from Gaza. That dream has been pulled from the shelves."

#### III. " Hamas Has No Choice "

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (March 15): "This evening, under Egyptian auspices, and presumably in the presence of Syrian representatives, the various Palestinian factions will meet in Cairo for what may well be remembered as one of the most important gatherings in the history of the Palestinian national movement. The gathering will center on a dialogue between the Palestinian Authority -- or more precisely, the Palestinian ruling party, Fatah -- and the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas.... The revolutionary change in Hamas's position signifies a degree of acceptance of the peace process. One can certainly point to international and regional developments that have led to this change, but there is also a direct cause: Hamas made a very strong showing in the local elections that took place in the West Bank and Gaza Strip a few weeks ago. After these elections, one of its representatives said: 'We now have a responsibility toward the masses who voted for us, and we cannot uphold this responsibility if we don't play a part in all the governmental institutions in the territories.' In other words, having decided to participate in the municipal elections, Hamas now has no choice but to go all the way and become a political party."

#### IV. "Congress Won't Let Arafat Die"

M. J. Rosenberg, director of policy analysis for the progressive U.S.-based Israeli Policy Forum, wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 15): "With Arafat gone and Mahmoud Abbas in Arafat's old job, Bush feels that at last he has a Palestinian leader he can work with.... To demonstrate his commitment -- and his view that it is a new day -- Bush has asked Congress to immediately provide USD 200 million in aid to the Palestinian Authority. For Bush that aid would constitute a U.S. down payment toward implementation of his vision of 'two states, Israel and

Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.' Too late in the fiscal year for a regular congressional appropriation, he 'requested' what is known as a 'supplemental.' He said it was a top priority. And what has been the congressional response to that request? We found out on Tuesday. The answer was 'yes, but.' There were so many 'buts' that they rendered the 'yes' almost meaningless.... At the Appropriations Committee session in which the aid was decided upon, one member of Congress after another got up and talked about Arafat. The late PLO chairman would be pleased. Most people do not continue to be major players on the Washington stage after their death, but Arafat is.... Taking actions like the House Committee did last Tuesday profoundly damages Israel. Israel wants a strong PA that can and will liquidate the suicide bombers and build a democracy that will live in peace with Israel. That is what Bush wants. It is what Sharon wants. What, in heaven's name, does Congress want?"

KURTZER